DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 226 789 JC 830 089

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TITLE Short-Term Training--Where the Action Is!
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Job Skills; *Job Training; *Labor Force Development; Program Descriptions; Retraining; *School Community Relationship; *Technical Education; Training Methods; Two Year Colleges; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Chemeketa Community College OR; *Short Term Training

ABSTRACT

In order to address major permanent changes in the economic structure and workforce of its community, Chemeketa Community College (CCC) in Oregon has made a commitment to initiate as many short-term training programs as its resources permit. Short-term training, which takes less time than regular one-year certificate or two-year associate degree programs, focuses on the acquisition of specific technical skills with minimum coursework in related subjects or general education. Beginning in August 1982, CCC began planning two separate short-term training projects in cooperation with the Mid-Willamette Valley Consortium. The Group Occupational Training Project (GOTP) offers short-term training in industrial skills training/mobile home construction, word processing, and typing/transcribing. The Classroom Training Project (CTP) trains dislocated community workers in the areas of electronic technology, computer operations, microprocessor repair, and computer-assisted drafting/graphics. These programs are open-entry/open-exit and competency-based, using course modules based on industry standards and validated through testing programs. Experience so far in planning and implementing these programs has provided insight into: (1) time, philosophical, and attitudinal constraints on initiating new programs; (2) strategies for maintaining consistent and positive relations between the college and consortium, and otherwise promoting program and student success; and (3) implications for CCC's future role in short-term training. (DAB)

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SHORT-TERM TRAINING--WHERE THE ACTION IS!

George R. Moore

Today, and, perhaps, well into the decade of the 1990's, short-term training is a significant aspect of the comprehensive community college. For a number of years, two-year institutions have done an excellent job of providing transfer education to those individuals wishing to complete a baccalaureate degree at a four-year college or university. Two-year institutions have been equally effective in providing one and two-year vocational training for persons desiring to assume entry-level positions as paraprofessions or technicians. And, two-year colleges have enjoyed much success by offering many adult education and community service courses. These roles will continue at a comprehensive community college. But, as we switch from an industrial society to one based upon information, communications and high technologies, major and permanent changes are taking place in the economic structure and the workforce of the community. With many workers being permanently or temporarily displaced, a genuine demand exists to train or retrain America's workforce in the shortest time--and in the most cost-effective way. If the comprehensive community college retains its adaptability, flexibility, responsiveness and cost-effectiveness, to educational demands, then short-term training represents a new and exciting opportunity for community colleges. At the risk of exaggeration, it could become the fourth major dimension in the evolution of the comprehensive community college.

Examples of Short-Term Training Programs

Short-term training may be defined in a variety of ways. Normally, such training may be described as taking less time than a regular one-year certificate or two-year associate degree program. Short-term training may be further characterized as learning which focuses primarily on the acquisition of specific technical skills with minimum coursework in related or general education areas. And, generally, the instruction is competency-based and organized so the student may pursue mastery of the subject matter individually, usually entering and exiting from instruction at different times during the year.

Using these guidelines to define and describe short-term training, Chemeketa Community College, in Salem, Oregon, has made a major commitment to initiate, in cooperation with the Mid-Willamette Valley Consortium, as many short-term programs as resources will permit. Beginning in August of 1982, the college started initial planning for a Group Occupational Training Project and for a Classroom Training Project.

Group Occupational Training Project. The development of the Group Occupational Training Project at Chemeketa was made possible by the Mid-Willamette Valley Consortium which invited proposals for the operation of training projects for CETA eligible clients residing in the College's service area. Of the 23 proposals to provide training and placement services to begin no earlier than October 1, 1982 and to terminate no later than September 30, 1983, Chemeketa's proposal was ranked number one, resulting in an award of $50,985. These funds enabled the institution to initiate short-term training in three major areas--in industrial skills training/mobile home construction, in word processing and in typing/transcribing.

The Industrial Skills Training/Mobile Home Construction Program has been operating successfully for nearly four years with successful placement both within and outside the mobile home industry. Employment projections for 1983 indicate a continued need for trained entry-level mobile home production line assemblers and finishers, primarily due to turn-over and seasonal fluctuations in sales. And, recent decreases in interest rates are likely to promote increased expansion in mobile home ownership and construction. Students may enter the Industrial Skills Training/Mobile Home Construction Program, based at a satelite campus, at any time and progress at their own rate of learning. The typical student should be able to complete the training in six weeks or 210 class hours.

Office occupations programs, such as word processing and typing/transcribing, have operated within the certificate and associate degree programs since Chemeketa opened in 1970, and at short-term training centers throughout the college's district for the past five years. Office occupations are listed in the 1982 State of Oregon Labor Market Information Survey as fields with significant placement potential, due to continuing demand and relatively low employment rates. In both the word processing and the typing/transcribing programs, the primary method of instruction is classroom lectures, supplemented by laboratory/workshop exercises. The amount of individualized training varies, but all course modules are open-entry/open-exit and competency-based, permitting some participants to advance rapidly, while others repeat material until it is mastered. The typical student will complete the training in word processing in 15 weeks (or 420 class hours). In the Typing/Transcribing Program, typically, the student will be enrolled for 11 weeks or 300 class hours.

Each student in the word processing and the typing transcribing programs has access to the microcomputer laboratory, the typing skills laboratory, the transcription laboratory and to other individually scheduled facilities, such as a complete audio-tape and video-tape library related to office procedures, word processing and electronics.

Classroom Training Project. In addition to the three short-term training programs initiated at Chemeketa Community College under the heading of The Group Occupational Training Project, the college launched another major short-term training effort in approximately August of 1982, called the Classroom Training Project. Chemeketa Community College cooperated with the Mid-Willamette Valley Consortium to identify workers in the immediate tri-county area who have been dislocated due to plant and lumber mill closures. Funding for the Classroom Training Program was made possible in part by a grant proposal approved by the U.S. Department of Labor for the Mid-Willamette Valley Consortium to be one of seven prime sponsors in the United States to operate a demonstration project during fiscal year 1983. To achieve the goals of the demonstration project, the Consortium and the college worked closely to establish training programs to serve approximately 125 dislocated workers. Occupational areas which have maintained or increased employment levels despite current economic conditions, and which are projected to exhibit growth during 1983, were identified. Further labor market research, including potential for employment, wage scales, and job classifications of potential clients, were used by the Consortium and the college to select four short-term training programs to begin in January, 1983, and to end no later than mid-August, 1983. From the total list of occupational areas compiled by consortium and college staff, the areas of electronic technology,

computer operations, microprocessor repair and computer-assisted drafting/ graphics were selected as the most promising for retraining of dislocated workers. All four short-term training programs are open-entry/open-exit and competency-based with course modules based on industry standards and validated in training offered at Chemeketa or through tested programs elsewhere, e.g., Heath Kit/Zenith Education Courses.

The nine month program in electronics trains participants in the shortest time possible and provides for quick entry into the field of electronics. As a result of course work in D.C. and A.C. electronics, soldering, printed circuits, test instruments, electronic communications, digital techniques, C Moss, microprocessors - interface, students will be able to trouble-shoot and test electronic equipment and electrical machinery. Completers of the program will be able to use information from blueprints and detailed drawings to test, adjust, and inspect products to insure that set standards and specifications have been met. Completers of the short-term training will be qualified to help in the development of electronic products, and be capable of repairing and servicing defective equipment.

The six month training program in computer operations is individualized and is planned for prospective students with a good background in English, math skills, typing skills and with some knowledge and experience in office work. Students completing the program will have a generalized knowledge of computer operations, including large and small computers and word processors. The training includes these areas because job openings for large main-frame computer operators have decreased, whereas jobs related to microcomputers (operation or sales) and word processing have increased.

The microprocessor repair program requires approximately three and one-half months for the student to complete.

The instruction is organized into modules from the individualized Heath Kit program. The Heath Kit gives students the opportunity to be "refreshed" on up-to-date materials, and to be well qualified for a variety of advanced rather than entry-level jobs in the field of electronic maintenance and repair.

Similar to the microprocessor repair short-term training program, the short-term training program in computer-assisted drafting and graphics is designed to take persons who already possess background and knowledge in the vocation and update those skills so they may be more employable in the field. Students receive new skills in computer-assisted design and in simulated computer-assisted manufacturing. Designed as an open-entry/open-exit program, the number of students is limited only by the available lab stations. Students may enroll any time a vacant lab station exists and they may leave upon satisfactory completion of the program. Students who have the prerequisite background in math and familiarity with the typing keyboard can complete the program in twelve weeks. Students who need to acquire the math and keyboard familiarity can complete the training in eighteen weeks.

The three Group Occupational Training Project programs and the four Classroom Training Project programs have been planned, budgeted, implemented and assessed in cooperation with consortium staff housed on campus and with regular staff assigned to the college's support services, such as cooperative work experience, placement and counseling. This experience so far in planning and implementing several new short-term training programs has provided insight into constraints to initiating new curricula, ideas on strategies for change, as well as some implications for the college's future role in short-term training.

Short-Term Training Constraints, Strategies and Implications

As far as constraints, some administrators perceive the community college's job as being to provide training only. To have a community college justify employment demand and to receive fuli funding of the project based upon a negotiated and quaranteed student placement is asking too much outside the proper role of the institution. Another real barrier is the time to respond to request for proposals (RFP's) and the lead time to implement the short-term training programs is usually quite brief with attention diverted away from operations for regularly budgeted programs. And, another real constraint occurs when the staff exhibit a natural, but not an intractable, attitude of defensiveness against short-term training programs fearing the quality of their one and two-year curricula will be jeopardized.

While constraints need to be recognized, there are several strategies which may assist an institution to deal effectively with short-term training issues. Certainly a major consideration is to maintain informal, low-key, consistent and positive relationships between college and consortium staff. There's wisdom in seeking a proactive representation of the college on various state and local councils or boards, such as the private industry council. Perhaps, of greatest importance, is having a firm and clear commitment from the college's chief administrators to short-term training. Also, success with short-term training programs is increased when college faculty and staff are used to teach students enrolled in the programs rather than hiring persons new to the institution. And, finally while it is crucial to develop a reputation for doing an excellent job in teaching, it is important to provide support services and to monitor the progress and the performance of each participant.

From our experience with the seven new short-term training programs, there are several implications for an institution wishing to achieve high success. The college should maintain a strong commitment to short-term training after the initial commitment. The institution should develop strong communication processes among faculty, staff and agency personnel so that directions are understood about budgeting, staffing facilities, the specific target populations for training and the particular focus of the instruction. The institution should value cooperating with each agency involved and to promote positive images and excellent public relations. The college, in collaboration with agency staff, should monitor the performance of each student and be able to document the skill level achieved as well as know any reasons for student attrition, the placement rate and the cost-effectiveness of the project.

In summary, an institution which deals with the constraints, establishes strategies, and weighs the implications of short-term training will be making a genuine contribution to meeting community employment demands. The institution will continue to be adaptable, flexible, community-based and have a significant role in reshaping the community's workforce. How significant the role of short-term training will be for a comprehensive community college will depend upon the particular institution. However, it does appear that P.L. 97-300, the Job Training Partnership Act will have a major impact on two-year institutions. The result could well be a new, fourth role for the comprehensive community college. The challenge is there...the opportunity for a significant response by the community college.

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APR 8 1983